Repentance the only Condition of Final Acceptance:

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED BEFORE

The DISSENTING CLERGY,

AT

MILL-HILL-CHAPEL in LEEDS,

SEPTEMBER 18, 1771.

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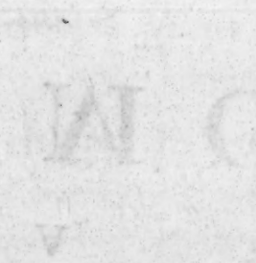
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MATTHEW iv. 17.

From that time Jeſus began to preach, and to ſay, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

FROM that time, *i.e.* from the time of his baptiſm, or from the time of *John*'s being thrown into priſon by *Herod Antipas*, ſon of Herod the Great, our Saviour being then about thirty years of age. From that period his public miniſtry commenced, and he taught openly. Before that time we have but few particulars of his life. Very little is recorded of him whilſt a private perſon, except that he followed his father's occupation of a carpenter, diſputed with the Doctors in the temple, and behaved inoffenſively towards all. But being arrived at a proper age, he

aſſumed a public character, in which he was remarkably diſtinguiſhed by his God and Maker. *Coming out of the water, the heavens were opened unto him, and lo, a voice from heaven, ſaying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed.* A prelude this to the future high department he was to fill in life, and in which he acquitted himſelf with equal honour and advantage. His inſiſting on being baptized by *John*, and the reaſon aſſigned for it, that *thus it became him to fulfil all righteouſneſs*, has been made, by ſome, a matter of difficult diſquiſition. It ſeemed to ſurprize John himſelf, that one who came to take away the ſins of the world, and in whom there was no ſin, ſhould want *his* baptiſm, which was that of repentance. But the reaſon ſuggeſted by our Saviour, and with which John ſeemed intirely ſatisfied, implies no more, than that it was decent and proper he ſhould enter upon his office in a ſolemn manner, by the ceremony of waſhing; for thus did all ſpiritual perſons qualify themſelves for the diſcharge of ſacred functions, both in the Jewiſh and Pagan world. Thus did Aaron and his ſucceſſors waſh them-

themſelves before they went into the tabernacle, to denote the purity of the ſervice they were going to engage in; and thus did our Saviour alſo *ſanctify himſelf*, or ſet himſelf apart for his office, by the ſignificant ceremony of waſhing. My farther attention ſhall be employed, 1. In conſidering the character of the preacher here ſpoken of; 2. The ſubject of his preaching; 3. The ſcripture notion of preaching Chirſt.

1. The character of the preacher was that of a law-giver, and a teacher ſent from God. I ſhall not here inquire into the reaſons that made his coming into the world expedient or neceſſary. This has been already done, and in a ſatisfactory manner too, by *Chriſtian Apologiſts*. I would only obſerve, that he had all the credentials we ſhould expect a perſon to have, who comes to us in the name God. Though *Moſes* was a divine law-giver, as well as he, and, as ſuch, claimed the attention of thoſe to whom he was ſent; our Lord's commiſſion was abundantly more extenſive, having for its object men of every tongue, kindred, and nation under heaven. The religious inſtitution of *Moſes* was, by the very ſtructure

ture of it, *local*, and could be the religion only of one ſmall nation. Had Paleſtine been five or ſix times larger than it is, his ſyſtem had been very inconvenient, not to ſay impracticable. *Local*, however, and peculiar, as it was, it had its excellence and utility. The views of heaven, in forming the Jewiſh people into a diſtinct and ſeparate body from all other nations, were gracious and ſalutary. The *Moſaic ſcheme of faith* ſeemed well calculated to ſerve two important purpoſes; the one was that of ſecuring the health and good morals, and promoting the frugality and induſtry of that nation; the other was that of preſerving among them the principles of religion uncorrupted, as well as facilitating their progreſs in the world; and to this laſt end the very ſituation of their country greatly contributed.

I would further obſerve, that, as the *unity of God* was the baſis of the Jewiſh polity and government, moral virtue is the principal and eſſential part of the ſyſtems both of Moſes and of Chriſt. I mean, the only thing inſiſted on as acceptable in the ſight of God. The eſſentials of religion are

are and muſt be, at all times, and under every diſpenſation, the ſame. The love of God and man are expreſly declared to be *more than whole burnt-offerings and ſacrifices* under the *Hebrew conſtitution*. In the *chriſtian one*, nothing at all is required but what is of a moral nature, or has a moral tendency. This is finely expreſſed by the prophet *Micah*; *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, or bow myſelf before the moſt high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, or calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or ten thouſand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul?*

If ſuch coſtly ſacrifices as theſe avail not to man's acceptance, pray what is he to depend upon for it? The Prophet ſhall anſwer for me; *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*

I ſay, Jeſus was a ſuperior law-giver to Moſes, and the mediator of *a better covenant*; better in ſeveral reſpects; chiefly this, that it was calculated for the univerſe

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in general, and enforced by everlaſting ſanctions, which the other was not. One was the mediator of a *temporary* conſtitution, the other of an *eternal* one.

The commonly received notion of a *mediator*, is one who interpoſeth between contending parties, to take up the difference, and make them friends; but this is not, I think, the preciſe ſcripture idea of a mediator. A mediator, in the ſenſe of ſacred ſcripture, is *one between God and the people*; who declares to them the mind of God, denounces judgments upon the diſobedient, and proclaims pardon to penitent characters; and there being only two authentick revelations from heaven to our world, of courſe, we read only of *two mediators*, employed to communicate the ſame to the people; and if there was to be a third revelation, there would alſo be occaſion for a third mediator; but the goſpel ſcheme, perfect and compleat in every thing relative to us, as degenerate creatures, ſuperſedes all future ſchemes and mediators. A religious ſyſtem inforced, as our Lord's is, by future hopes and fears, which it inſpires, muſt greatly exceed any

other

other in point of *moral influence*. Compared with this, *that* of Moſes, however expedient for the Jews, was *weak*, and unequal to the purpoſe of making them, or others, virtuous in any conſiderable degree. It was only preparatory to ſomething better, and is therefore ſtiled, by the apoſtle, a *ſhadow of good things to come*.*

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* By a *ſhadow*, I apprehend, is not meant, that the whole *apparatus* of the Jewiſh tabernacle and temple, was typical of the goſpel ſcheme. Throughout the epiſtle to the Hebrews, the two ſchemes of Moſes and Chriſt are compared, and the preference given, as in juſtice due, to the latter. Whatever advantages a Jew might boaſt of in the law of Moſes, the ſame, and much greater, were derived from the faith of Chriſt, but the apoſtle never once intimates, that the one diſpenſation was a type of the other. All he ſays, is, that the religious ſyſtem of the Jewiſh legiſlator, when compared with the nobler one of Chriſt, is no more than a ſhadow compared with the ſubſtance. It would not have been to his purpoſe, to advance any ſuch doctrine, unleſs his countrymen had been inſtructed by their law, in the ſcience of types and figures, and in the proper application of them; but no ſuch thing being found there, an argument built upon, or urged from them, would have had no propriety in it. But to be a little more particular. By a type, I mean an *intended prefiguration* of ſome future perſon or event, of which I ſhall give one or two inſtances by way of illuſtration. Iſa. xx. the prophet is deſired to looſe his ſackcloth from off his loins, to put off his ſhoes, and to walk naked and barefoot, which he accordingly did. Now the event which this prefigured, as well as the *intention* to prefigure,

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Our Saviour, being the ſuperior character, had his miſſion alſo confirmed by ſuperior

we have in verſe 3. of that chapter, *Like as my ſervant hath walked naked and bareſoot, three years, for a ſign upon Egypt, ſo ſhall the king of Aſſyria lead the Egyptians priſoners, naked and bareſoot.* Here was not only a ſimilarity of circumſtances (for a ſimilarity alone will not make a type) but the one was *intended* to prefigure the other.

Another inſtance I ſhall give from prophane hiſtory. It is reported of the famous *Hannibal,* when he was going to give battle to the Romans, that he made a ſpeech, as uſual, to his ſoldiers, before the engagement; and that his harangue might have the deſired effect, previouſly ordered his troops to form in a circle, and a number of captives to be placed in the midſt loaded with fetters, *Annibal rebus priùs quàm verbis adhortandos milites ratus, circumdato ad ſpectaculum exercitu, captivos montanos vinctos in medio ſtatuit.* This was a language they all underſtood, and was a ſignificant repreſentation of their future condition. Should victory declare for the Romans, *quædam velut imago veſtræ conditionis*; and they all underſtood it in this light. But where, I deſire to know, is it ſaid that Levitical ſacrifices were *intended prefigurations* of the chriſtian ſcheme, or of the death of its founder? Whether was this event prefigured by *propitiatory* or *euchariſtical* ſacrifices? For, in fact, his death is compared to both; though, I think, deſignedly prefigured by neither. Certain it is, that the Jews had no ideas of this kind. Otherwiſe they would not have been ſcandalized at the ſufferings of Jeſus. The doctrine of types and figures, ſo pompouſly diſplayed in *ſyſtematic theology*, has been of no ſervice to religion. On the other hand, the arbitrary and unwarrantable manner in which its miſtaken friends have applied the *Moſaic rites*, has afforded matter of triumph to its adverſaries. The taſte for

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perior and diſtinguiſhing credentials, not only in the greater, and more extenſive utility of his *religious ſyſtem*, but alſo in the beneficent miracles of his life, and above all in his reſurrection from the dead. Each of theſe would require a diſtinct diſcourſe; but as this comes not within my preſent plan, I ſhall wave all farther conſideration

typical religion ſeems to have been derived, originally, from the *Fathers*, whoſe characters are all marked with a turn for low allegory. Who could imagine, that one who lived ſo near the apoſtolic age as *Clemens* of Rome, would aſſert that an imaginary bird, called the *phenix*, was a type of our reſurrection, or that a ſcarlet thread hung out from the window of Rahab's houſe in Jericho, by order of the ſpies, typified the blood of Chriſt? And yet this is real fact—*Ex uno diſce omnes*. Not content with thus ludicrouſly applying the various particulars of the Hebrew hiſtory and theology, many of our modern divines, more pious than wiſe, will needs have it that Chriſt was typified alſo by moſt of the diſtinguiſhed characters, civil, military, and religious, under the Jewiſh theocracy. Hence *Abraham*, *Iſaac*, *Jocob*, and *Joſeph*;—hence ſome Judges in Iſrael, particularly *Samſon*, and ſome Jewiſh monarchs, ſuch as *David* and his ſon *Solomon*, have been thus honoured. Obſerving, I ſuppoſe, ſome circumſtances in the life of each, ſimilar to ſome circumſtances in the life of Chriſt, they imagined they might, in ſtrict propriety, pronounce them *types* of him. But a ſimilarity of circumſtances will not conſtitute a type, where the *intention* to prefigure is not expreſsly declared. Otherwiſe I do not ſee why *Alexander the Great*, or *Julius Cæſar*, might not, with equal propriety, be called types of Chriſt.

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of them, and would juſt obſerve, with regard to his private character, that it was ſuch, and ſo remarkable, that he left it to the juſtice of his enemies (enemies too, neither deficient in penetration nor malevolence) *which of you accuſeth me of ſin? And if I ſay the truth, why do you not believe me?* *His doctrine* and pretenſions had been to little purpoſe, if his life had given the lye to both. One coming from God, and indeed any profeſſed advocate for virtue, who would have his teaching regarded, muſt himſelf be diſtinguiſhed by an uniform attachment to what he recommends. Otherwiſe he will do more hurt by his example, than he can do good by his doctrine. Our Lord's life being, in every reſpect, irreproachable, gave an importance and credibility to his public miſſion and character. He neither had, nor appeared to have ambitious views, nor any intereſt, in ſhort, diſtinct from that of the moral welfare of mankind. He was neither rich, nor graſped at riches; ſo far from it, that he rejected even a *crown* when it was offered him. One thus denied to the world, and thro' the whole of life ſo conſpicuous for integrity

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of character, cannot, in reaſon, be ſuſpected of bringing a falſe meſſage. Surely the man who deſpiſes riches and honour when he might enjoy both, and ſo far from courting the favour and applauſe of the world, makes himſelf obnoxious, by the freedom of his diſcourſes, and bold oppoſition to popular vices and prejudices, gives the moſt convincing proof of his love of truth that can be given. One can find no traces of impoſture in *any* part of our Saviour's life, leaſt of all in the *concluſion* of it.

2. Proceed we now from the character of the preacher to the *ſubject* of his preaching. And it is, indeed, ſuch as one might naturally expect from a divine teacher, ſent to reform a licentious and degenerate world. The writers of his life, who could neither be deceived themſelves, nor had any intereſted views in deceiving others, unanimouſly declare, that *repentance* was the ſubject of all his diſcourſes. Upon his aſſuming a public character, and during the courſe of his miniſtry, he declared that the end of his miſſion was the reformation of mankind, the *calling ſinners to repentance*, in expectation of a future life of rewards and

and puniſhments, to take place after death;* to qualify them for which life, no ſacrifical

* The reſurrection of the dead to a future immortal life, is one of the peculiar doctrines of chriſtianity. Concerning man's reſtoration to a life of conſciouſneſs, reaſon, and action after the preſent comes to its period, there is nothing explicitly taught in the law of Moſes, nor any thing in the age prior to it, whence one can infer a ſeparate exiſtence of the ſoul after death. The ſentence pronounced upon *Adam*, *In the day thou eateſt thereof thou ſhalt ſurely die*, muſt mean, if it has any meaning at all, that God would deprive him of that life, of thought, knowledge, and action, which he had beſtowed upon him, or, in other words, that he ſhould ceaſe to be what he then was, a living and intelligent being. Could *Adam* imagine the ſentence imported only, that one half of him ſhould live, and the other half die? I think not. It was not the diſſolution or death of the body that was threatened, but the death of the *man*. And if he had any hope of living again, or of being reſtored to a *conſcious exiſtence*, he muſt derive that hope, not from the *immateriality* of the ſoul, which he knew nothing of, and which, perhaps, we know as little of, but from a divine promiſe. Arguments from reaſon in favour of a future ſtate, however ingenious or plauſible, are by no means ſolid and concluſive. They may, indeed, afford an agreeable amuſement to the ſtudious in his cloſet, or they may furniſh matter for the exerciſe of his rhetorical talents in a pulpit, as they ſometimes do; or they may be thought proper ſubjects of philoſophical diſquiſition in the ſchools, but they can yield no ſatisfaction to one deſirous of having his faith and hope of immortality eſtabliſhed. For my own part, I look upon all arguments of this kind as ſo many attempts, I do not ſay intentional, but eventual ones, to ſuperſede the neceſſity and importance of the chriſtian religion.

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fical rites, no offerings, however expenſive, no attachment to religious modes and forms, and indeed nothing ſhort of *moral purification*, or real reformation of character, would avail any thing at all.

Wherever he diſcovered a diſpoſition in his fellow citizens, as he often did, to found their acceptance with God on things unconnected with moral character, he never failed to rectify the miſtake. *Ye pay tythe of mint, anniſe, and cumin, and neglect the weightier matters of the law, mercy, judgment, and the love of God.* The promiſes of his religion, *as ſuch*, are all of a ſpiritual and eternal nature, and, at the ſame time, are all connected, not with external obſervances, but moral obedience. To a Jew of diſtinction, who inquired what he muſt do to inherit eternal life, his anſwer was, *Thou knoweſt the* (moral) *commandments.*

By their inſiſting on the proof of a life to come from the light of nature, many ſeem not aware that they are paying the *Deiſts* an undeſigned compliment, a compliment which they have no right to, being one at the expence of truth. All reaſonable conceſſions I have no objection to our making them, but a conceſſion of this kind is, in my opinion, very little ſhort of giving up the cauſe of Jeſus, for he it was that brought life and immortality to light; and eternal life is, in every ſenſe, the gift of God through him.

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To a lawyer, who aſked the ſame queſtion, his anſwer was to the ſame purpoſe, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyſelf. This do and thou ſhalt live.* To the crowd that followed him upon miſtaken principles, John vi. his declaration was, *Whoſo eateth my fleſh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raiſe him up at the laſt day.* The expreſſions are, no doubt, highly figurative, but their meaning is ſufficiently explained at verſe 63, of the ſame chapter. *It is the ſpirit that quickeneth; the fleſh profiteth nothing. The words that I ſpeak unto you, they are ſpirit, and they are life, q. d.* A practical regard to the laws and ſpirit of my religion, will fit you for a much better kingdom than *that*, which ye fooliſhly imagine I am come to ſet up amongſt you.

It requires no great degree of attention to diſcover the terms of our acceptance with God. As it is the moſt important thing in religion, it is alſo the plaineſt. If there is any meaning in our Saviour's ſermon on the mount, *moral character*, and that only, muſt recommend us to the Supreme

preme Being. For, throughout the whole of that ſermon, good diſpoſitions and a virtuous life are connected with his favour. Moral duties are there uniformly inculcated, and conformity to his high and holy character as uniformly recommended; and had all preachers ſince his time adopted his manner, and proceeded upon his plan, it would have been much to their honour, and their labours had been abundantly more ſucceſsful. For I muſt obſerve, that all thoſe diſcourſes which have not the improvement of virtuous temper and practice for their object, are abſolutely in vain. I wiſh I could not add, that they leave both readers and hearers worſe than they found them! And yet how *cautiouſly* are ſubjects of this kind touched upon by many, who would be thought *lights* in the chriſtian church! An itch after what is falſely called *popularity*, fear of combating vulgar but deſtructive prejudices and opinions, have betrayed ſome great men into great errors. Had our Saviour gone this way to work with *his* hearers, he might juſtly have been reputed, what was ſlanderouſly reported of him, and what ſome affirmed

that he was, a *deceiver of the people*. In his time, religion was reduced to its loweſt ebb, by a ſet of *trimming teachers*, who had removed it from its proper foundation, to make way for their own traditions, and unrighteous influence over the people. Our Lord was ſo juſtly provoked with their proſtitution of conſcience, that he expreſſed himſelf concerning them in terms of the higheſt indignation; *Ye generation of vipers, how can ye eſcape the damnation of hell!* The only teſt of religion amongſt them, was that of mumbling prayers towards the temple, offering ſacrifices in it, and paying the accuſtomed tythes. Moral virtue, though eſſential in their law, ſeems to have been, with *them*, hardly a *ſecondary* conſideration.

In oppoſition to ſuch tenets, and deſtructive principles of every kind, our Lord appears to have delivered that ſermon, and, as I am inclined to believe, with no inconſiderable ſucceſs. He was obliged to ſtand upon an eminence, that the whole multitude might ſee and hear; and in the concluſion, it is ſaid, *they were* (not diſſatiſfied

fied or diſguſted with, but) *greatly aſtoniſhed at his doctrine*; which, if I miſtake not, implied, at that time, a high degree of approbation. The people, leſs corrupt than their ſuperiors, did juſtice to the preacher; and yet a diſcourſe upon the ſame principles and plan *now*, ſeems ſo little acceptable to the vulgar, that, if the preacher eſcape without cenſure or inſult, it is all the favour he has to hope for.

What this ſtrange turn of mind is owing to, whether the deluſion of their paſſions, or the deluſion of ſuch guides as have marked out for them a more compendious way to heaven than that of repentance, I know not; but this I do know, and affirm, that had our Saviour not preached repentance, or had he delivered any ſcheme of principles different from what he taught, while a reſident in this world, I ſhould not have looked upon him as the ſon of God. One characteriſtic of an inſpired teacher is, that his doctrine and laws be ſuch as promote the virtue and happineſs of mankind. This was eminently his caſe, and what gave credibility to his miraculous works.

All his actions and diſcourſes had this tendency. They all centered in one and the ſame point, that men ſhould forſake their vices, love God, be grateful for his mercies, and reſigned to his government; that they ſhould love one another, forgive one another, do what is right and good in ſocial life, and ſo uſe the world as not abuſing it. This is a ſhort abſtract of our Lord's religion, but, ſhort as it is, I hope it will be thought a *juſt* one. I find nothing delivered in the four goſpels, as connected with final felicity, beſides repentance.

But no where do our Lord's ſentiments more fully appear, or are more emphatically expreſſed, than in the deſcription of the laſt *deciſive* day, to which, for a few moments, I would lead your thoughts.

At that day ſome will build their hopes of mercy upon their caſting out devils, and propheſying in Chriſt's name; others upon eating and drinking in his preſence, or hearing him preached in their ſtreets. On theſe and ſuch like *foreign* conſiderations, many, he intimates, will ground their claim

claim to the juſtification that is final. But, at the ſame time, he tells us, theſe are not the things that will be examined into, as not conſtituting any part of the real character; that their acquittal, or condemnation, will depend upon their behaviour in *their moral department*. Have you fed the hungry, or have you not? Have you clothed the naked? Have you viſited the diſtreſſed? Have you been hoſpitable to the ſtranger? Have you been juſt and friendly to all?

No regard will, according to this repreſentation, be had to any thing but the rectitude of the heart, and moral conduct of the life. No inquiry will be made as to what one believed, or how much he believed, what ſpeculative points he buſied himſelf about, or diſturbed others with; what mode of religion he adopted, but—Did he live virtuouſly? Did he abound in proper regards to God and man? Did he keep his paſſions within their juſt limits? Did he live with honour to himſelf, and utility to the world?

The intemperate zeal of many *now*, for their reſpective opinions and modes of worſhip, no other account will be made of, at *that* day, but to condemn them for ſacrificing charity and peace to unimportant circumſtances, and equally trifling ſpeculations. No regard will be had *then* to orthodox faith, or to the want of it, but only to the moral temper and character. One's faith, be it ever ſo right, will not, at that day, be found right enough to ſanctify a wrong practice. At that ſolemn time, the honeſt and good man will be found to be the much preferable character to the *ſound believer*. Theſe things, I hope, ſhew, beyond poſſibility of doubt, not only what the ſubject of our Lord's preaching was, but alſo that *morality* was the topic he *always* choſe to diſcourſe on. What are all his parables, but ſo many *public lectures*, that have all one ſcope, either the removing ſome unreaſonable prejudices, or conveying moral leſſons under eaſy, pleaſant, and familiar images?

His *private* diſcourſes had the ſame object. In a converſation with *Nicodemus*, on the

the ſubject of regeneration (which, by the bye, has been unaccountably inveloped by the *myſtery-mongers* of the laſt and preſent age) he informs him, that the conſtitution of his kingdom was ſuch as required moral purity, or right diſpoſitions and conduct, of all who deſired admittance into it. In a more private one ſtill, with the woman of Samaria, he explains the true worſhip of God, as conſiſting, not in external pageantry, but in becoming conceptions of his character and government, and in the exerciſe of loyal and good affections. Under the metaphor of water, and its aptneſs to quench thirſt, he likewiſe recommends *religious character*, as what alone can gratify man's nobler powers, and prepare him for that endleſs life which he brought to light.

I might reſt the matter here; for what higher authority can one appeal to on the ſubject, than that of Jeſus himſelf? But as an additional proof of the point under conſideration, I ſhall alſo give you the ſentiments of his immediate friends and followers.

The

The ſubject of the *Baptiſt*'s preaching, was the very ſame with that of his *chief*, whoſe appearance, as a public perſon, he announced. At the ſame time that he gave notice of his coming, he declared, that reformation of moral character, *and that only*, could qualify them for the kingdom he was going to erect. Far from flattering their ſchemes of revenge, pride, and ambition, he directed their attention to worthier objects, aſſuring them, that the Meſſiah's kingdom was one of truth, virtue and righteouſneſs, and that their privileges, as Jews, therefore, would be of no ſervice to them there. *Think not to ſay, We have Abraham to our father. q. d.* "Your being "deſcended from that venerable patriarch "will profit you nothing in the kingdom "of Chriſt. The ſpirit and character of "Abraham muſt be yours. In order to "this, you muſt diſmiſs all your vitious "habits, and bring forth fruits meet for "repentance." To the multitude, that aſked him what they ſhould do to eſcape the wrath to come, † his anſwer was, "Cul-

"tivate

† Though John and Chriſt both preached repentance, their miniſtry differed in this; the former declared that, with

"tivate benevolent and charitable regards "for all, eſpecially the poor, whoſe ne- "ceſſities call for what you can conve- "niently ſpare." *He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat, let him do likewiſe.* To the Publicans his ſermon was, *Exact no more than what is appointed you,* neither defraud the government, nor oppreſs the people. To the ſoldiers he *ſaid, Do violence to no man, neither accuſe any man falſely, and be content with your wages.*

As to our Lord's immediate followers, ſuch of them, at leaſt, as have left any writings behind them, they all ſpeak the ſentiments of their maſter, purſue his plan, and connect penitence with life everlaſting, as he had done before them. This will appear by ſelecting a few paſſages out of numberleſs ones that might be produced.

St. Paul's diſcourſe to the learned Greeks at *Athens,* merits the attention of all ſuch

with regard to penitent characters, the penal conſequence ſhould not take place, but gave no intimations of eternal life.—This was properly the province of Jeſus.

as have any value for good ſenſe, true religion, and ſound morals. After expoſing the abſurdity of *their ſyſtem*, and ſhameful abuſe of their intellectual powers, both which he does in a maſterly way, he ſets religion upon its true and proper baſis, I mean the exiſtence and providence of one God, *in whom all live and move and have their being*; intimating, that a worthier and more rational homage was due to him, than that which they had hitherto paid him. His firſt care was to eſtabliſh juſt conceptions of him, in oppoſition to the gloomy and uncomfortable ideas of ſuperſtition, and to recommend a ſervice correſponding to thoſe conceptions. Having done this, he next leads their thoughts to the ſuperior light, with which God had been pleaſed to befriend the world, in the diſpenſation of Jeſus, of which he wiſhed they might avail themſelves, by a thorough reformation of principle and practice. For that all men, penitent as well as impenitent, ſhould paſs in review before the ſupreme judge hereafter, and meet with a treatment proportioned to the degree of their reſpective characters. *God will judge*

the

the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he raiſed from the dead. No diſcourſe could have been better adapted to the purpoſe for which it was delivered.

A like propriety we may alſo obſerve in a diſcourſe of the ſame apoſtle to *Felix*, the Roman governor of Judea. That provincial magiſtrate expreſſing a deſire to hear him on the ſubject of chriſtianity, Paul, with an honeſt freedom, and yet with all the deference due to *magiſterial power*, told him, that the faith of Chriſt had for its object, the reformation of every moral corruption, and the eſtabliſhment of every ſocial and perſonal virtue; that this faith, far from ſoothing the follies and vices of any; far from palliating the diſſipations of high or low life; far from relaxing ſocial, moral, and religious obligation, was deſigned to carry virtue to a higher pitch than any former inſtitution had taught men to aſpire. It was in this manner he preached Chriſt to him, and, fearleſs of the frowns of ſo tyrannical a man, he preached home to his conſcience, ſuited his diſcourſe to the caſe of one ſo remarkable as he had been, for oppreſ-

oppreſſion, luſt, and cruelty. So pointed, and, at the ſame time, ſo pathetic was his addreſs, that his diſtinguiſhed hearer could not reſiſt the force of it. He trembled, as he well might, for the conſequence of ſo much miſconduct as he ſtood chargeable with. In this manner, I ſay, did he preach the faith of Chriſt unto him, urging, as a motive to the diſcharge of its important obligations, that he muſt anſwer before the tribunal of God hereafter, for his ſhameful violation of them here. He applied none of the *modern opiates* to his conſcience, as one may eaſily conclude from the diſturbance which his diſcourſe gave him, and the abrupt manner in which he was diſmiſſed by him.

Shall it be ſaid that Paul, in ſome of his epiſtles, eſtabliſhes a doctrine *ſeemingly* very different from what he preached to the Roman Governor, viz. *that faith alone is the inſtrument of a ſinner's juſtification before God!* No. The apoſtle does by no means contradict himſelf, much leſs weaken the obligations of religion and virtue. The juſtification mentioned in his letters to the

Romans

Romans and *Galations*, is the goſpel method of juſtification, which grants pardon to penitent offenders *for ever*, in oppoſition to the law given by Moſes, which, though it might juſtify a Jew *politically*, could not juſtify him *eternally*. LAW, *as ſuch*, juſtifies no tranſgreſſor, and the diſpenſation under which the Jews lived, made no proviſion for penitent characters beyond the grave. Beſides, no one ever urged the obſervance of moral or good works with greater warmth than our author does *in thoſe very epiſtles*. It is not to be ſuppoſed, therefore, he would recommend a faith that could not produce them.

Had St. Paul addreſſed his noble hearer in the modern *cant ſtyle*, and, on the modern principle of *vicarious and imputed righteouſneſs*, it is more than probable he had made a convert of him to *that* doctrine, and been much careſſed by him. One of *his* complexion and character would have been highly entertained with the enchanting idea; but how, on *ſuch* a principle, he could have converted him to juſtice and temperance, is one of the many things which, I

profeſs myſelf incapable of accounting for, and which, I believe, would have puzzled St. Paul himſelf.

Let us next attend to the ſentiments of another goſpel preacher, who, though not ſo eminent as the former, ſeems to have had the intereſt of religion and virtue as much at heart; I mean St. Peter. In the firſt and ſecond ſermon which he preached, after ſhewing the correſpondence of ancient propheſies to the character and hiſtory of Jeſus, he declares repentance to be the condition of God's final favour, and of our acceptance. *Repent, and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out*; adding, withal, that the diſtinguiſhed grace intended the Jewiſh and Gentile nations, by the appearance of Chriſt in the world, was that, of *turning both from their iniquities*. At the ſame time that both apoſtles deſcant very copiouſly on the love of God in Chriſt, they both aſſert, that no ſins ſhall be forgiven that are not repented of and forſaken. *Shall we continue in ſin that grace may abound*, was a conſequence charged upon *Paul*'s principles by ſome who under-

underſtood them not. The apoſtle abhors the inference, as well he might. *God forbid! how ſhall we, that are dead to ſin, live any longer therein!* In ſhort, the idea of the chriſtian diſpenſation, which both its founder and his immediate followers invariably exhibit, is that of a plan, a gracious plan, eſtabliſhed for the benefit of penitent characters only. And, to add no more on this head, the firſt and the laſt doctrine preached by the authors of our religious faith, *as connected with the peace of God*, is that ſingle one of REPENTANCE. The Baptiſt opened the ſcene with repentance. *Bring forth fruits meet for repentance*; and the book of *Revelation* cloſes with the ſame doctrine; *Bleſſed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and enter through the gates into the city!*

3. Having thus proved what the ſubject of our Lord's preaching was, and what both he and thoſe that ſucceeded him inſiſted on, as of the firſt importance, it will not, methinks, be a matter of difficulty

culty to aſcertain the true notion of *preaching Chriſt*.

Many have been the diſputes on this ſubject, and theſe conducted, as religious diſputes generally are, in ſuch a way, and with ſo much animoſity, as tends to extinguiſh the ſpirit of the goſpel. On no ſubject whatever, perhaps, have good manners and chriſtian charity been leſs attended to. But with ſome *ſeraphic* ſpirits, *charity*, I find, is only another name for *infidelity*.

On this ſubject it is, however, no ſmall comfort to an honeſt mind, that he is not to be guided by the opinions of men; that he has our Lord's declarations and practice to appeal to, on which he can ſafely reſt his faith and hope. A teacher from God cannot deceive him, though all others ſhould. And had *his* teaching and *his* inſtructions, on this and other ſubjects, been more regarded, and thoſe of others leſs, his profeſſed followers had been a more harmonious body than they are at preſent, and, very probably, in other reſpects alſo, more virtuous.

Accor-

According to the foregoing account of things, which no chriſtian, I think, can either deny or controvert, *preaching Chriſt* is preaching what Chriſt himſelf did preach. It is to preach repentance from dead works, on the principles and motives of his goſpel. Theſe are *redeeming* love on the one hand, and the hopes and fears as to *hereafter*, which that goſpel inſpires, on the other. If this be not the true *ſcripture notion* of preaching Chriſt, I am ſtill in the dark, and deſire for ever to remain there. The deſign of public teaching, if it has any deſign at all, muſt be to revive and rivet the ſenſe of moral obligation, to improve the influence of good principles upon the temper and character, and thereby increaſe the quantity of virtue in the world.

And yet this object, in itſelf ſo deſirable and important, is kept ſo little in ſight, that ſcarce any thing is called *preaching* now-a-days, by many, beſide declamations in favour of particular ſyſtems of thinking, equally void of ſenſe and temper, accompanied with dreadful anathemas againſt all who ſhall controvert their authority.

And this the advocates for *traditionary* ſchemes of faith, of which we have a great many, do, in their great wiſdom and modeſty, call *preaching Chriſt*. But I would not have them deceive themſelves, or the people. Wrath and rancour are ſurely no virtues, and want of charity is as ſurely want of chriſtianity. The ſpirit we ſhould all cheriſh and cultivate is a meek, humble, and merciful one; a ſpirit of purity, peace, and love; a ſpirit of patience, reſignation, and obedience to the will of God; for this, and no other, is the ſpirit of Chriſt; and he that makes it not his principal ſtudy to recommend this amiable temper, and to exemplify in himſelf what he thus recommends, knows nothing at all of the ſpirit of his office, and might as well preach *Mahomet* as preach *Chriſt*, whom, in fact, he blaſphemes.

Though I have read the New Teſtament often, and, if I am not ſtrangely deceived, without any attachment to preconceived opinions, and without any view but that of inveſtigating truth, I never could diſcover there any terms of God's final favour, beſides

beſides repentance; much leſs could I ever diſcover in that ſacred *code*, the licentious doctrine of *a foreign righteouſneſs*, which ſome make the conſtant topic of their diſcourſes, and many more build their hopes upon, inſtead of the chriſtian one, of *perſonal virtue and obedience*. To exhibit chriſtianity in this light, will not, I am afraid, reflect much honour upon its founder.

Much were it to be wiſhed, that ſome, whoſe chief concern it is to retail out their own unmeaning ſchemes and *reveries*, would employ themſelves in the nobler work of recommending to the people they have the charge of inſtructing, the good ſpirit of the goſpel, with a ſuitable practice and converſation. If our Saviour's preaching will be admitted as a rule and model to his followers, as in juſtice, I think, it ought, I cannot but infer, with the ſtricteſt propriety, that where the neceſſity of univerſal virtue, and its importance to everlaſting ſelf-enjoyment is not preached, neither is Chriſt preached. For his religion is that of repentance. Repen-

tance is at once the foundation, the end, and the glory of the chriſtian ſcheme. To repreſent it in any other light, is doing a real injury to the character of its author, and an almoſt irreparable one to the morals of his ſubjects.

That the faith of Chriſt has been corrupted by the traditions and doctrines of men is a truth, which all honeſt minds ſee and lament; but of all other corruptions introduced into it, *that* ſeems the greateſt, and moſt pernicious, which depreciates moral virtue, and makes it of the loweſt, if of any importance at all, in the ſight of God. *Think not*, ſays Jeſus, *that I am come to deſtroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil.* *He* deſtroyed no laws, much leſs the laws of everlaſting righteouſneſs. He did not even deſtroy the *ceremonial law*; for that was the law of the Jewiſh civil government, which he had it not in his commiſſion to repeal, or abrogate.

A very unaccountable notion of preaching Chriſt ſeems, at preſent, to prevail in many

many places, as if it ſuperſeded the exerciſe and neceſſity of moral virtue. Some imagine the grace of God cannot be *free*, where the diſagreeable clauſe of *working out their own ſalvation* is tacked to it; that to preach Chriſt is to declare, with oracular authority, to ſuch as unhappily attend their miniſtry, that their *own* obedience, their *own* penitence, will do nothing for them in the final iſſue of things; but that all their ſins are to be charged to the account of Chriſt, *their ſurety*; that *his* righteouſneſs, and not their *own*, ſhall ſcreen them from the wrath to come.*

I would

* The Calviniſts ſay, that Chriſt was puniſhed as the ſinner's *ſurety*, and obeyed as his ſurety; that this was in conſequence of a ſolemn ſtipulation with his Father before all worlds, that in caſe man offended, and became delinquent, he would diſcharge the penalty, and fulfil all obligations on the ſinner's part. I deſire firſt to be informed, where this tranſaction is recorded? for it is in no bible that I have ever yet ſeen. I deſire next to be informed, where Chriſt is ſtiled the ſinner's *ſurety*, for I cannot find that he is any where ſo called in the New Teſtament. He is, indeed, ſtiled the εγγυος, or *ſurety of a better teſtament*, Heb. vii. 22; but that, I apprehend, conveys a very different idea. As the words imply a leſs perfect teſtament with a ſurety, I would obſerve, that Moſes declared to the Jews, or ſtipulated, that all the temporal good things promiſed, ſhould be given them, on the condition ſpecified in

I would aſk, did Chriſt himſelf ever preach any ſuch doctrine? If not, what right or authority have others to preach it? It is a doctrine not only falſe in fact, and as abſurd in theory as it is falſe, but ſeems alſo well calculated to ſupport the kingdom which Chriſt came to deſtroy. It is a doctrine extremely agreeable to the depraved inclinations and paſſions of men, and ſanctifies thoſe paſſions in all their unjuſtifiable extravagance; but a doctrine that will neither bring men to repentance here, nor to heaven hereafter. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap. Let no man deceive you. He that doth righteouſneſs is righteous. He that doth not righteouſneſs is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.* We have a divine authority for believing that repentance blots out ſin, but

in the covenant; and of this his miracles gave them the moſt authentic aſſurances; but we read of no ſtipulation on his part to bear the puniſhment of their rebellion. In like manner, God declared, by Jeſus, that the better promiſes of the goſpel ſhould be fulfilled to thoſe that complied with the conditions of it; but, at the ſame time, we read of no aſſurance on Chriſt's part, that he would bear the puniſhment of their ſins, or that any ſuch impoſſible thing was ever demanded of him.

cannot

cannot find we have a like authority for believing, that it is blotted out by *imputed righteouſneſs*. This ſcheme does, moreover, as already hinted, carry ſo much abſurdity upon the face of it, as an honeſt man, or, indeed, a man of common ſenſe, would be aſhamed to father upon the chriſtian religion. One can perceive no traces of it there, nor was it known and believed in the world many hundred years after our Lord and his apoſtles left it.*

From the ſubject thus diſcourſed on, I would infer, 1. The propriety of rectifying a miſtake, which many well-diſpoſed minds, as well as others, labour under, and that is, their confounding the *means* of religion with *religion itſelf*; a miſtake ſo

* I was once inclined to believe, that the doctrine of *ſatisfaction* and *imputed righteouſneſs*, unknown to the evangelical writers, muſt have been the production of thoſe antient writers who are ſtiled, by way of eminence, the FATHERS; but, from all the inquiries I have hitherto been able to make, I cannot find this horrid and blaſphemous doctrine, at leaſt in its full extent, in their writings, credulous and viſionary as many of them were. I am, therefore, inclined to think, that we muſt ſeek for it in an age much later, and probably as low down as the age of PETER LOMBARD.

general,

general, that I do not know one that is more ſo. *Prayer*, for inſtance, is univerſally allowed to be a *mean*, or *inſtrument* of true religion, but it is not religion itſelf. There can be no religion in muttering a few ſentences, and often incoherent ones, to God Almighty, with hands and eyes uplifted. This may be done, and is too frequently done, by the vileſt miſcreants. True devotion conſiſts in proper ſentiments of God, and in the exerciſe of loyal and grateful affections, which prayer is a noble mean of improving; and where theſe are actually eſtabliſhed, the end of prayer is anſwered. But would it not be ridiculous to believe that prayer, abſtracted from the moral fruits of it, is good for any thing? Would not that man be deemed both fooliſh and mad, who ſhould truſt his acceptance and ſalvation merely to his praying? Undoubtedly.*

The

* If by *religion* be meant, our doing whatever God requires of us, it will comprehend all *poſitive* as well as *moral* duties; but, ſince the former are enjoined only on account of their ſubſerviency to the latter, they are theſe only that conſtitute religion, in the more reſtrained and proper ſenſe of the word. If by *prayer* we mean a mere *addreſs to the Divine*

The *Lord's ſupper* is alſo an inſtrument of religious character, but is not *religion itſelf*; for the action of receiving bread and wine, *as ſuch*, can have no more religion in it than any other common action of life. It is only intended, by recalling to our thoughts the character of *Jeſus*, and our obligations as his diſciples, to promote the chriſtian temper and practice; and hence it derives all its value. But where theſe are diſregarded, eating and drinking in Chriſt's name, ſo far from being *religion*, are an inſult upon it, and the moſt deteſtable hypocriſy. The *ſacrifice of Chriſt*, there commemorated, is another motive of religion, and a very powerful one too; but it is no more than a motive. For let it be obſerved, that the ſingle circumſtance of dying, or laying down one's life, if ſeparated from the moral end it is deſigned to bring about, has no religion at all in it, nor can be of any value in the ſight of

Divine Being, it is wholly of a *poſitive* nature; but if, under that term, we comprehend the exerciſe of devout and good affections, accompanying that addreſs, it is alſo of a *moral* nature.

God.

God. What gave Chriſt's death a value, was the religious and good purpoſe which it had a tendency to ſubſerve; and that was the redeeming men *from the power of all iniquity*, and inſpiring a zeal for every good work.

Faith, too, upon which ſo many unwarrantably build their hopes, is no more than a *mean* of becoming reformed. Faith is a ſtedfaſt belief of the truth of what Chriſt did and taught, but if this faith produces no amendment of character, what is it good for? Nothing in the world. It is not, therefore, *faith* that ſaves the ſinner, but only the amiable fruits it produces, even the fruits of righteouſneſs, to the glory and praiſe of God.

Should any perſon, then, found his acceptance with God upon *prayer*, upon *ſacraments*, upon *faith*, or even upon the *ſacrifice and ſufferings of Chriſt*, he is evidently building upon the means and circumſtances of religion, while he overlooks religion itſelf. Now if I either underſtand the bible or common ſenſe, there is no miſtake which the

the ſacred writers have more carefully guarded againſt, than that of truſting to the *means* of religion for acceptance. *The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord,* was one falſe confidence of the Jewiſh nation. Their being *Abraham's children* was another. The confidence of many chriſtians has no better foundation, and is as palpably abſurd. * "Lord Jeſus, the merit "of thy obedience we plead, excluſive of "all perſonal righteouſneſs!" But Jeſus hath rejected their plea, in very expreſſive language; *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of*

* *Merit* is a term unknown to the New Teſtament writers, and does, in the ſtrict theological ſenſe of it, imply, *a claim of right* to favour from God, in conſequence of ſuch ſervices as the *claimant* was not under obligation to perform. This being the proper acceptation of the term, what I contend for is, that it is neither applicable to Chriſt, nor to us, conſidered as the creatures and ſervants of God. Though Chriſt chearfully did, and patiently ſuffered the will of God, I think no one will diſpute his *obligation* ſo to do; and if ſo, with what propriety can it be ſaid that he *merited* ſalvation for us? The truth is, it is no where ſaid that he did; he did not, in this ſenſe, even merit ſalvation for himſelf. If in this I am miſtaken, which at preſent I am not conſcious of being, I hope ſome one, better inſtructed, will be kind and candid enough to ſet me right.

heaven,

heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father, who is in heaven.

The not diſtinguiſhing betwixt the means of religion, and religion itſelf, has been fruitful of dangerous conſequences. It has led perſons to found their acceptance with God, not upon repentance, where the ſcriptures do always found it; not upon real perſonal and inherent ſanctification of character; not upon doing the will of God; but—upon believing another has done it for them, and that a righteouſneſs, which is not their *own*, ſhall be accounted their *own* at the laſt day.*

Often

* Dipping into the preface of a late book, called *The Complete Duty of Man*, I found there the following curious definition of *ſaving faith*, viz. "A dependance on the righte-" ouſneſs and death of Chriſt, as a full ſatisfaction to the " juſtice of God, for the ſins of the world." This definition, though not originally the *complete* writer's own, ſuggeſted the following queries, which I humbly ſubmit to his venerable conſideration. After giving ſuch a definition of *chriſtian faith*, what occaſion was there for writing a book upon *chriſtian duty?* Does any duty follow from this deſcription of faith? Does it not ſuperſede all duty? In juſtification of his notion of ſaving faith, the author alledges its being conformable to the ſentiments of the church of England,

Often have I cautioned againſt miſtakes of this kind, and as often declared, agreeable

England, and other Proteſtant churches. Poſſibly it may, and be very erroneous notwithſtanding. His buſineſs was to ſhew its conformity to the ſentiments of *Jeſus*, which I do not find he has even attempted to do; and no wonder, truly! For the tendency of it is to ſhake the fabric of natural and revealed religion to its loweſt foundation. The followers of Calvin, ever ſollicitous to defend *outworks*, however untenable, ſay, in vindication of *vicarious* righteouſneſs, that, though believers be not *really* righteous, they are conſidered by their Maker as righteous, only for the righteouſneſs of Chriſt; that is ſaying, in plain language, *God conſiders things to be what they are not*. Moſt excellent divinity! though not much to the honour of its patrons, and leſs to the honour of God.

The Calviniſtic ſyſtem is ſtrongly tinctured with the ſpirit of its author, who was a man of violent paſſions, and could bear no contradiction. Controverſy, in which he was much engaged, added to the natural aſperity of his temper, and threw him greatly off his guard, both in ſpeaking and writing. While warmly oppoſing Popiſh errors, himſelf fell into errors no leſs dangerous. In his zeal againſt *human compenſations*, *penances*, and the like, which Catholics laid ſtreſs on, he aſſerted, that the ſatisfaction of Chriſt only could avail to ſalvation, independent even of faith or works. While *they* urged the merit of good works, *he*, on the other hand, deſtroyed both their merit and neceſſity. Not content with pulling up the *tares*, he pulled up alſo the *wheat* with them. Not ſatisfied with removing what was ſuperfluous in the building, he proceeded to remove the foundation itſelf.

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able to the moral feelings of human nature, that happineſs and miſery ariſe out of perſonal character, and are inſeparable from it; inſomuch that, were one to be admitted into a virtuous ſociety, ſuch as we ſuppoſe heaven to be, with his vicious habits upon him, ſo far from giving him pleaſure, it would give him diſguſt. It is not any thing *without* the man that defiles him; nor is it any thing *without* the man that juſtifies him; but out of his own real internal character proceed his pangs or his pleaſures, his juſtification or his condemnation.

Enough has been ſaid on the ſubject of *preaching Chriſt*, to ſuch as are governed

A like ſpirit ſeems to have animated the great German reformer, *Luther*, whoſe opinion on the ſubject of moral righteouſneſs I ſhall tranſlate for the benefit of the Engliſh reader. "This, I ſay, that the doctrine which maintains "the neceſſity of good works to ſalvation, is the firſt and "the laſt, the worſt and moſt damnable hereſy that ever "exiſted on the face of the earth." His diſciple, *Nicholas Ambdorf*, goes yet one ſtep farther, and ſays, "That "good works not only do not contribute any thing to ſal-"vation, but are rather a hindrance to it." Whether to propagate ſuch doctrines be doing ſervice to religion and mankind, I leave it to the abettors of them to conſider.

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by the maxims of his religion; and to others I am afraid I have ſaid a great deal too much, if too much can be ſaid on ſuch a ſubject. Happy would it be, if thoſe who aſſume the province of being guides to others in what concerns them moſt, inſtead of perplexing them with unintelligible doctrines, or amuſing them with falſe hopes, and groundleſs confidence, would recommend to their attention the *great things* of God's law, and the ſteady imitation of Jeſus's character! Happy, if, laying aſide all party principles, and thoſe *ſpurious ſchemes of ſalvation*, which chance or education have thrown in their way, they would ſhew themſelves advocates for common ſenſe, rational piety, and the religion which is according to godlineſs!

2. It follows from what has been diſcourſed on, that inſiſting on repentance, as the only thing eſſential to man's final felicity, is ſo far from depreciating the grace and love of God, that it is a diſtinguiſhing inſtance of it. It was owing to the goodneſs of God that mankind had ſuch a revelation at all, a revelation ſo full

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of comfort to them, and that opens a proſpect into futurity unknown before; a revelation which no merit of theirs intitled them to, and which, in reaſon, therefore, they ought not to quarrel with the terms of. Mercy without terms had been no mercy at all. It would have proved an injury rather than a benefit, and have made the world ſtill more wicked, inſtead of reforming it.

I would, laſtly, infer the neceſſity of guarding againſt deluſions of every kind, thoſe eſpecially that have a pernicious influence upon the moral temper and character. And, in order to this, let us by no means admit into our *creed* ſuch doctrines as bid defiance to reaſon and common ſenſe, and can, therefore, have no ſanction from revelation. No *principle* whatever can be a *ſcriptural one*, that has not for its object the reformation of men's moral characters, and their improvement in every chriſtian virtue. Equally true it is, that virtue and goodneſs can never be the offſpring of corrupt principles. *Corrupt* I call ſuch principles, as leave repentance or good works out of a ſinner's juſtification before

before God; for God will never juſtify the wicked. *Whoſoever*, ſays our Saviour, *breaketh one of theſe leaſt* (moral) *commandments, or teacheth men ſo, ſhall be called the leaſt in the kingdom of heaven.* A declaration this, very remarkable! and which demands unremitting attention from all parties, and from every religious denomination. And though the *merit* of good works all agree to diſclaim, and diſavow, as a doctrine replete with abſurdity, I need ſcarce obſerve that it is equally abſurd, and more dangerous, to diſavow their *importance* and *neceſſity*. Be it our care, then, as it is manifeſtly our duty, to concur with the views of heaven, in ſupporting their immutable obligation; ever remembering, that he in whom we believe made them the great baſis of his religion, and the only terms of final comfort to all his followers.

When men begin to blend their own doctrines, with thoſe of *Chriſt Jeſus*, doctrines, too, confeſſedly ſubverſive of moral obligation, it is, methinks, high time for the friends of truth to ſound the alarm. Who, that has any feelings of conſcience, any ſenſe of duty, any regard for the

public, any reverence for his maker, can bear to hear the moral law diſparaged, and thoſe amiable virtues ſet at nought that were the glory of our Lord's character, and raiſed him to the right hand of God? Perſons are, of themſelves, but too often diſpoſed to break through the obligations of truth and virtue; and what lengths may not we juſtly fear they will go, when the very principles they are taught, and have imbibed, encourage them ſo to do? Well may ſervants ſteal, and lye, and ſwear, and defraud their maſters; well may children be undutiful to their parents, and licentious in their lives; well may maſters and heads of families be inattentive to their important truſt, while they are taught to place no dependance on commanded duties, and that, in the affair of juſtification, a bad conſcience is equally acceptable to God with a good one. A ſtrain of preaching this, which, however outraging to every good principle, is not uncommon; and can ſerve no other end but to keep vice in countenance, and extend its influence in the world.

Let

Let us beware of making that any part of our religion which is no part of the religion of *Chriſt*. *His* goſpel builds all the comfort, and all the hope of chriſtians upon *practice*. Let us take heed we do not build the ſame hope upon *faith* and *opinions*. The end of chriſtianity, and of all true religion, is the *love of God and man*. Where, therefore, a perſon's principles do not kindle and keep alive in his breaſt this noble flame, he had better be without any principles at all; for they will only make him two-fold more the child of unrighteouſneſs than he was before.

One would almoſt wonder to find many, who have bibles to read, ſo fluctuating in their religious notions. They are ſtrangely toſſed about from one thing to another, and in doubt *what*, or *whom* to follow; to-day declaring for one leader, the next day adopting another; ever learning, never the wiſer; mighty zealous for religious modes and ſpeculations, but great ſtrangers to the benevolent ſpirit of chriſtianity. They dare not openly condemn good works, at the ſame time that they inſinuate a diſbe-

lief of their importance. But the wonder will ceaſe when it is conſidered, how much mankind are under the influence of their paſſions, how deſirous they are of a religion that will controll them as little as poſſible, and of reconciling their future expectations with licentious appetite.

If they find it hard to come up to the terms of the goſpel, they will employ all the art and ingenuity they are maſters of, to bring the goſpel down to their own terms. Thus the *Ethiopians*, to render their own dark complexion leſs diſagreeable, painted the god they worſhipped as black as themſelves; and thus the Pſalmiſt introduceth the ſinner blaſpheming the character of his maker, with a view to excuſe or palliate his own; *Thou thoughteſt that I was altogether ſuch a one as thyſelf.* Hence they caſt about for complaiſant and indulgent ſchemes; * and hence alſo they read

* I know of no ſcheme that will ſuit them ſo well as *Calviniſm*; for I know no ſcheme ſo unfriendly to the intereſts of religion and virtue. As the Calviniſtic ſyſtem was at firſt erected in anger, and with precipitation, it has been

read the ſcriptures, not ſo much with a view of learning their duty, as of ſupporting

been productive of little elſe beſides anger, wrath, and malevolence ever ſince. There are in this ſyſtem ſo many jarring principles, ſuch an aſſemblage of *Theiſm*, *Tritheiſm*, *Manicheiſm*, *Fataliſm*, *Fanaticiſm*, and *ſuperſtition*; ſo much contraſting of *faith* and *reaſon*, *common ſenſe* and the *goſpel*, that, if the author's original intention had been to give us a ſyſtem of abſurdity and contradiction, he could not have preſented us with one more glaring. And yet this very man (crude and futile as his ſyſtem is) has had more diſciples than any other religious *demagogue* in the Proteſtant world. Would you know the reaſon? It is very obvious. He has releaſed men from the low drudgery of governing their paſſions and their lives, by placing their ſalvation upon a different bottom. According to him, man is a mere machine, that moves and acts juſt as he is acted upon; that he hath naturally in him the ſeeds of every vice, but of no one virtue (though I do not ſee how a being, by nature incapacitated for virtue, ſhould ever be capable of vice) that he is born to hate all virtue, human and divine, and even the fountain of both; in ſhort, that he is (not a compound of good and evil, *that* were ſome ſmall comfort, but) an uncompounded miſchief; that if, by a ſtrange coincidence of circumſtances, he ſhould at any time *deviate* into virtue, and honeſty, it would be of no ſervice at all to him in the ſight of God; perhaps make him paſs only for a more ſplendid ſinner; that his moral obedience, however ſincere and extenſive, can neither be the ground of his hope or his happineſs. Thus has he diſmiſſed his followers from all moral obligation.

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ing the licentious ſchemes they have formed to themſelves.

I am ſenſible that in what I have ſaid, I have not paid an extraordinary compliment to *the many*, nor to the *leaders* of *the many*; and ſorry I am that I cannot pay them one more to their honour. However, if what has been de-

By a ſtrange aſſociation of ideas, he was led to conclude that, becauſe *ſome* things in *Popery* were bad, every thing in it muſt be ſo. This hurried him from one extreme into another, from the juſtifiable extreme of condemning *meritorious* works, into the oppoſite one of condemning *all* works. And, therefore, on Calviniſtic principles, I do not ſee how one can be religious. On chriſtian or goſpel principles he *may* be a good man, and, indeed, ought to be the beſt of men; but as ſoon may one expect to ſee a clear ſtream iſſuing from a polluted fountain, as repentance proceeding from Calviniſtic doctrines, *as ſuch*.

As diſſuaſives from all truſt and dependance upon one's own goodneſs are the conſtant topics of diſcourſe with Calviniſtic divines; as they are ſo conſtantly reminding the people of the inſignificance of perſonal integrity; which they affirm will do them no ſervice hereafter, and that it is neither the *cauſe* nor *condition* of their ſalvation; I would aſk, Is it any wonder that principles ſo friendly to human paſſions, and ſo compatible with the licentious gratification of them, ſhould have ſo many votaries? It would be the greater wonder if they had not. And were it not that nature kindly and powerfully counterworks the influence of ſuch principles, their baleful effects would be ſoon and ſeverely felt.

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livered ſhall in the leaſt contribute (as, by the bleſſing of God, I hope it may) to give them juſt views of religion, to turn the attention of the one to what is their proper buſineſs and department, and to ſettle the minds of the other, amidſt the claſhing of inſignificant ſpeculations and party opinions, the *freedom* of this Diſcourſe will need no apology. To *ſome*, it is poſſible, the freedom of it may give offence; and yet I hope their nnmber, in this place, is but ſmall. My intention in compoſing it was not to offend, but to edify. I have, however, the ſatisfaction to believe, that I have ſaid nothing but what Chriſt and his apoſtles have ſaid before me, if I rightly underſtand either. And if to recommend a chriſtian character and converſation to *all*, as the great inſtrument of their final felicity, does, unfortunately, give offence to *any*, I ſhall be ſorry for it on their own account; but the offence will ſit eaſy upon my own mind. One, at my time of life, who is haſtening to the grave, and, by the courſe of nature, at no very great diſtance from it, can be under no temptation to diſſemble his ſentiments.

ments. They muſt be matters of great moment indeed, that will juſtify one's doing ſo at any time, or on any occaſion. I have an everlaſting intereſt depending, as well as others, and am not, I truſt, without a ſerious concern about it; but I dare neither flatter them, nor myſelf, with the proſpect of ſecuring it on any other terms than thoſe of the goſpel. To do either, were an unpardonable offence indeed! and I might juſtly be found fault with as one that *talked wickedly for God, and handled his word deceitfully.*

To conclude. I know of no road to glory, honour, and immortality, beyond death and the grave, but one, and that is, repentance on this ſide of it, and patient continuance in well doing. *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ſtedfaſt and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; that when he who is our life ſhall appear, we may have confidence, and not be aſhamed before him at his coming.* AMEN.

FINIS.

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